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MotoGP

In the thick of it...

Time for the 85th Dutch TT this Saturday and the only circuit to have been part of every world championship season since 1949. Assen might be 10km shorter than it used to be in the early 1950s but it might still be hard to call from this bunch who will be setting the pace...or maybe not considering Yamaha's current dominance

Photo by Martin Heath









Back in the hunt...

High Point was aptly named in terms of Ken Roczen's comeback from a spate of injury problems to grab his first overall victory in Suzuki colours. It was his first Outdoor success for the brand since winning the 2010 MX2 Grand Prix of Italy

Photo by Simon Cudby



AMA-MX

**MX**

Face says it all...

Romain Febvre; teeth gritted and drilling that works YZ450FM quite unlike any other MXGP rookie this decade. The Frenchman leads the series after three consecutive victories in the premier class and needs one more to equal Tony Cairoli's 'Rookie Record' of four in a debut season, set in 2009

Photo by Ray Archer





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MX

GRAND PRIX OF GERMANY

TEUSCHENTHAL · JUNE 21st · Rnd 10 of 18

MXGP winner: Romain Febvre, Yamaha

MX2 winner: Tim Gajser, Honda



PLAY

TRIP-UPS

By Adam Wheeler
Photos by Ray Archer

LAST WEEKEND'S GRAND PRIX OF GERMANY WAS AS MUCH ABOUT THE RESULTS THAT DIDN'T HAPPEN... COSTLY CRASHES FOR MAX NAGL AND JEFFREY HERLINGS SAW BOTH RED PLATE HOLDERS OUT OF THE RUNNING AS ROMAIN FEBVRE AND TIM GAJSER TRANSFERRED THEIR WINS ACROSS FROM ITALY THE PREVIOUS WEEK



The 2013 & 2013 MX2 World Champion and current points leader takes a heavy tumble in the opening seconds of the German Grand Prix. A fractured collarbone was the damage and no word yet on a return date with the Swedish GP just over a week away

Where to begin? Over the years we've seen how MXGP can spin-up on itself in a moment and anything like a formbook is usually more akin to a flimsy pamphlet. Germany was yet another example among many. What should have been the most triumphant homecoming of Red Bull IceOne Husqvarna Max Nagl's career turned into a minor nightmare through the cold winds of Saturday at Teutschenthal. Yamaha Factory Racing's Romain Febvre, the rookie who dealt with a broken arm and two hernias during the off-season and who was supposed to have had a hefty crash by now (according to many experts) took three in a row on Sunday (going 1-2), scooped Nagl's warmed red plate and maintains a 50% win rate from the last four Grands Prix.

Then in MX2 Red Bull KTM Jeffrey Herlings' latest injury eye-roller in a catalogue that is starting to grow alarmingly thick sparked emotions and memories of a horrendous time for the twenty year old in 2014. The Dutchman was already concerned about his ability to stamp his superiority on an MX2 class that has seen four or five other athletes reach peak form despite the fact he guarded a lead of almost three Grands Prix in the standings at the midway point. It seemed like '84' was on a mission to dominate in Germany until his slip going up the hill mere seconds into the opening race. A clean fracture, another surgeon's table but Herlings has the chance to return to GP still in control of MX2 and to focus on the bigger goal of taking a third title. Of his opponents he will have to watch HRC Gariboldi's Tim Gajser the closest. The Slovenian is the nearest in terms of form and potential to 'do a Tixier' on Herlings and he cut the margin at the top of the standings to 100 points with his second successive GP victory at Teutschenthal. Standing Construct Yamaha's Valentin Guillod was again an aggressor and his penultimate lap move on Monster Energy Kawasaki's Jordi Tixier was the highlight of the first MX2 run. Monster Energy DRT Kawasaki's Max Anstie made good on a holeshot for the most convincing moto performance of the weekend.

It was a tale of two races really. The first motos were mostly static and drawn-out affairs and this was a much to do with the haphazard watering of the hard-pack as it was the similarity in the lap-times among the front-runners. The terrain was left alone in the break and close fighting was seen in the second sprints as a result. The second MXGP outing was the pick of the day as Febvre, HRC's Gautier Paulin and the electric Wilvo Nestaan Husqvarna's Dean Ferris circulated within a few seconds for the lead and a charging collective behind included the likes of Rockstar Suzuki's Kevin Strijbos, Yamaha's Jeremy Van Horebeek, Hitachi Construction Machinery Revo KTM's Shaun Simpson, Red Bull KTM's Tony Cairoli, Red Bull IceOne Husqvarna's Todd Waters and the improving 24MX Honda's Christophe Charlier.

Two of the riders pushing for the last step of the MXGP podium, Van Horebeek and HRC's Evgeny Bobryshev, were both emotional back in the paddock after Strijbos' last lap move – for the second time in a week – had bumped the Belgian into the top three. Van Horebeek was furious at his misfortune in hitting the floor in the second moto after a close call with Dean Ferris and then fighting back to touching distance of an overdue trophy. Bobryshev seethed frustration at what was his best chance to win a Grand Prix since he made a small slice of history in the sport at the same circuit in 2011. For the second weekend in a row 'Bobby' has been one of the fastest athletes on the track and is entering a genuinely exciting phase of his campaign – one of the few since he joined HRC in 2011 – at full fitness and good health. Van Horebeek is also reaching the speed and potential of his 2014-self...even if the rumours persist on a switch to Suzuki for 2016 although he allegedly has been offered another contract by Yamaha. Perhaps more than at any other Grand Prix so far Shaun Simpson looked to be struggling with his privateer set-up.

MXGP GER



The older KTM model just didn't seem to hook up or track as well as the Japanese bikes and the varying grip levels of the German soil was a tangible challenge for the data and electronics specialists in the paddock, none of which the Scot's modest set-up can count on.

It was re-assuring to see Gautier Paulin performing a little bit more like 'Gautier Paulin' and at the front of an MXGP field instead of mired in the mid-top ten which has been his slot mostly this season through a combination of factors: set-up, starts, bad luck and perhaps some conservatism.

Tony Cairoli continues to remain tied to the mast and weathering the storm. Only time and intensive treatment can fix the two fractures in his hand and the fortnight break before the paddock rolls into Sweden is a much-needed breather. With the second moto holeshot Cairoli stayed in the mix for as long as he could and showed that even with reduced fitness then he is one of the quicker and braver operators out there. Ninth place overall in Germany and the Sicilian is doing exactly what needs to be done to stay in the championship fight. In fact he went to Teutschenthal trailing Nagl by thirty points and left the aging venue only seventeen behind Febvre with his former teammate wedged in between. All things considered it was a positive weekend of work by 222 and there was a general opinion around the media centre at Talkessel that as soon as Cairoli is in shape again then he will hammer this series with both barrels. We seen that kind of devastating focus before and personally I doubt there will be a stronger rider as the series enters the final phase and each point becomes even more precious.

'Injuries' is a recurring topic now. Monster Energy Kawasaki duo Tyla Rattray (lower back) and Thomas Covington (hand/wrist problem) were joined by Wilvo Nestaan Husqvarna's Alex Tonkov whose spectacular get-off while drag racing Gajser through a bumpy straight section to a step-up led to a dislocated right shoulder. Focus fell on track preparation with the rock-hard ruts and bumps a source of criticism but

for every rider who slated the course there was another to be found who enjoyed racing it. 450s are now squarely back in the centre of the target in terms of responsibility for the attrition in MXGP (and AMA) and more meetings have occurred in and out of the paddock to discuss and possibly start planning a new formula for the future. It could be in place as quickly as 2018.

Attention grabbers from the support programme included Kiara Fontanesi's perfect 1-1 to set up a repeat of the 2014 WMX finale in the Czech Republic and the three-time No.1 is just two points behind Livia Lancelot now. The Frenchwoman went 2-2 in an equally tense pair of outings where neither could afford a mistake with a view towards the championship. EMX250 now has four riders split by nine points in the standings with five rounds of nine in the bag. Three of those shone briefly at Teutschenthal. Damon Graulus winning the first race but then stalling the Kemea Yamaha in the second. Adam Sterry leading the second moto on the Wilvo Forkrent KTM until he crashed into the fence and became entangled like a war hero and Bud Racing Kawasaki's Maxime Desprey kept quiet and reasonably consistent to make sure of the podium. Rockstar Suzuki's Brian Hsu grabbed a maiden top three after sweeping most two-stroke junior competitions in the two previous seasons but it was Husqvarna's Steven Clarke who notched his first overall win and it was hard not to feel happy for the reigning champ, especially after the second round farce of having his race machinery stolen from the paddock in Holland.

The FIM World Championship is curling and twisting like the narrow Teutschenthal layout itself and is proving to be just as bumpy. There are several narratives in each class that have made the 2015 edition the most fascinating in recent years and there is still three and a half months, three continents and 400 points in which the drama can continue.

MXGP GER

A day of '2's: Cairoli takes 22 points home through more salvage exercises in MXGP while Kiara Fontanesi's double win means the gap at the top of WMX is just 2 points with one round left to go



A second moto duel between the French - Paulin and Febvre - was decided when the Yamaha man had a goggle lens problem. In the paddock Scott were showing off the new lines of Tyrant and Hustle eyewear with the help of Shaun Simpson and they also intro-ed the curious new 550 Boot

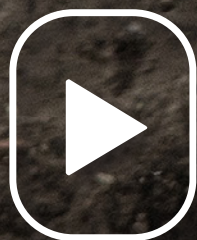


PLAY





Dean Ferris was back to good health and produced his best performance in MXGP yet on the FC350



PLAY



A rich vein of form for Tim Gajser with two wins in a row and the Slovenian must be ruing DNS' in Thailand and the UK that would have put him closer to Herlings. The gap at the top of MX2 at the moment stands at 100 points with 400 still left to win in 2015



Valentin Guillod getting into shape and towards his third podium of the season to keep Gajser under pressure in the standings. The Swiss apparently has a three year deal with Yamaha and should enter MXGP in Blue for 2016



A first moto win in ten months for Max Anstie helped the Brit to a first MX2 podium of 2015. Ken De Dycker (below) hits the MXGP gate and pulls out of the second moto. The Belgian apparently broke his shoulder in two places after his late fall in the first moto and has already had surgery. Could it be the last we see of the Red Bull KTM rider this season? There was already talk of the veteran retiring this year





Van Horebeek is knocking on the door of a first rostrum appearance of the year and came so close in Germany. Meanwhile Steven Clarke (above) took the EMX250 No.1 to the top spot at round five of nine in the feeder series



Simpson pulls a wheelie and finally finds some grip in what was a difficult weekend for the British Champion. Jordi Tixier (right) also missed out on the MX2 'box' for the second week in a row

Yamaha CLASSIFICATION & WORLD CHAMPIONSHIP

MXGP OVERALL RESULT

Riders

1	Romain Febvre, FRA	Yamaha
2	Gautier Paulin, FRA	Honda
3	Kevin Strijbos, BEL	Suzuki
4	Jeremy Van Horebeek, BEL	Yamaha
5	Evgeny Bobryshev, RUS	Honda

MXGP STANDINGS AFTER 10 OF 18 ROUNDS

Riders	Points
1 Romain Febvre	369
2 Max Nagl	360
3 Tony Cairoli	352
4 Gautier Paulin	324
5 Evgeny Bobryshev	306

MX2 OVERALL RESULT

Riders

1	Tim Gajser, SLO	Honda
2	Max Anstie, GBR	Kawasaki
3	Valentin Guillod, SUI	Yamaha
4	Jordi Tixier, FRA	Kawasaki
5	Julien Lieber, BEL	Yamaha

MX2 STANDINGS AFTER 10 OF 18 ROUNDS

Riders	Points
1 Jeffrey Herlings	398
2 Tim Gajser	298
3 Valentin Guillod	297
4 Pauls Jonass	288
5 Jordi Tixier	286





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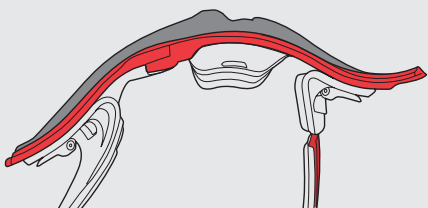


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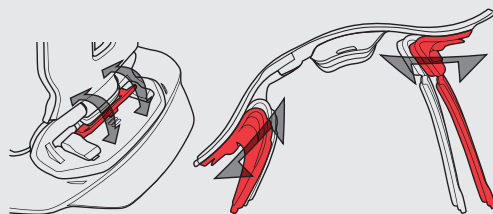
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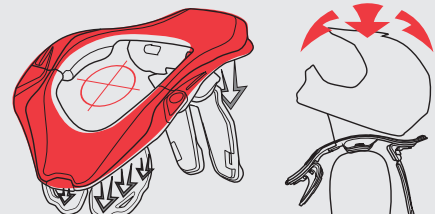
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(TESTING) TEUTONIC TIMES?

By Adam Wheeler

Waiting impatiently in the airport to fly to Berlin last week I began thinking about Max Nagl and whether he would have believed that he'd be in command of the premier class of the FIM Motocross World Championship heading to his home Grand Prix. The MXGP press corps is so accustomed to seeing the 27 year old dealing with some kind of adversity every season that it seemed a case of 'when' not 'if' Max would soon start to run into some trouble. How cynical can you be? Horribly so it would turn out...

Nagl had missed the podium for three events by the time he drove his camper into the Talkessel facility but a thirty point lead before round ten of eighteen indicated that it was those around the Red Bull IceOne Husqvarna rider were losing their mojo. MXGP has effectively waved goodbye to Clement Desalle for the fourth year in a row due to an injury mishap. It could be argued to a degree that Ryan Villopoto wasn't even immersed in the MXGP game before he counted himself out of it and subsequently seems to have fallen off the map somewhat. Tony Cairoli has picked himself off the deck from heavy crashes at least twice and recurring hand/wrist problems from those accidents means that the six times-in-a-row world champion is playing catch-up for the first time since he entered MXGP in 2009; a year incidentally in which Nagl finished second in the series, his best classification so far.

And when it comes to Gautier Paulin (only two podium appearances before Teutschenthal including one imposing victory) and the HRC machine that Nagl left behind then the German might be able to smile inwardly - such was his sincerity in interviews since he confirmed that he was leaving Honda - that an inability to change the character of the CRF450RW was at the root of what had been a dream move-turned-disappointment.

Since coming under KTM's wing at the beginning of the noughties and finding speed and form on a bigger motorcycle compared to anything he was showing on a 125, Max has always had access to good equipment and resources. His nationality helped at a time when there was a dearth of German talent in Grand Prix. He made holeshots and runaway moto victories something of a trademark but always seemed to be unseated by a broken bone. Even in that 2009 highpoint a fall in France would lead to another fracture of a collarbone that has been repeatedly plated and fixed meaning that Nagl will live with metal work in his body for the rest of his life. The nadir was a lower back ailment in 2011 that even had KTM doubting his long-term prospects as GP winner and by 2012 he was out of orange.

Ironically it was his re-association with Austrian manufactured machinery - both the bikes and the suspension - that would lead to the form and consistency of 2015. Late last summer he finally had the Honda he wanted by the final two fixtures of 2014 and the pace in Brazil and Mexico where he took first and second positions had Red Bull IceOne Husqvarna rubbing their hands that they had a (still) very capable athlete on their books. Qatar was a whitewash and a wake-up call to the Villopoto-Cairoli obsessed hoards; ashamedly I have to throw myself into this lot. Nagl then addressed one of his supposed weaknesses - a hesitancy and awkwardness (maybe that 'nice guy' persona too much in evidence) for overtaking - by blitzing past all in the second moto in Argentina for round three; probably one of the most accomplished performances of his career.

In this very magazine Max has talked about the successful blend with IceOne, the FC450, his former KTM mechanic Bart Dirkx and the physical preparation that has addressed lactose allergies.



The package has become formidable and Nagl until Teutschenthal – had also taken good fortune in his stride such as the first lap fall in Britain that left him dead last...but then the race was stopped and he claimed third in the restart.

Despairingly his luck ran out in Germany of all places. There was little info on the exact nature of his ankle surgery from the team so it is a mystery whether Max is out for the week, a month or the season. Considering he DNS-ed Sunday at Talkessel and is now just nine points behind Romain Febvre, Nagl is still very much in this fight. This coming week will be crucial to know if he has any chance of following Tony Cairoli's lead, gritting his teeth, getting on the bike, doing the laps and getting points with Swedish and Latvian GPs back-to-back.

If he can make it then the big question is: Do I believe Max Nagl can be world champion? There is a bloody good chance. The best chance yet, because this '15 Nagl' is the only rider apart from Romain Febvre with the confidence and momentum to take a serious run at the final phase of MXGP this year. The only hesitation I have revolves around Cairoli, who has too much experience in constructing a title-winning campaign compared to Max who was in uncharted territory with the red plate for so long. If the Sicilian gets healthy then I believe he will find another gear and he has three sandy Grands Prix ahead although Nagl is no slouch in the terrain himself. Questions will be asked of Paulin after his Teutschenthal resurrection while all MXGP riders will be keeping an eye on Febvre.

There is something about the romantic and cyclical nature of sport that says that 2015 could be at last Nagl's time. But then we have been here before and there are not many of us who will forget Josh Coppins' righteous and ill-fated attempt

at the 2007 crown. As a writer it would be fantastic to explore some of the Febvre-Cairoli-Nagl-Paulin rivalry as the series begins to wind down.

I would also like to see Max join that club of riders who are a success because they can 'stay'. Too often manufacturers and teams spunk big money on athletes for their immediate win potential rather than their nuance to strategize an entire season and play the long game. Entering the gate, leaving the line and making the flag is just as important a skill as having the raw speed to win motos. Nagl could be accused of being in the former camp and a title in 2015 or at least the number two plate – particularly after the adversity of last weekend - would mean a milestone shift in his career and some deserved good times for essentially one of the good guys of the paddock.



FEATURE

TYLA CALLS TIME

By Adam Wheeler
Photos by Ray Archer

2015 has turned out to be a tough campaign to end a highly successful career at the very top level of motocross and thirteen years with some of the most glittering and powerful teams in the sport, but Tyla Rattray has decided to clean and pack the boots, helmet and goggles away for good come the eighteenth and final round of the season at Glen Helen. The Monster Energy Kawasaki rider invited us to the factory team on Saturday at Teutschenthal to talk for the first time about his decision to stop racing, the reasons and some early perspective on a CV that boast wins in Grand Prix and AMA and the 2008 MX2 World Championship...



Tyla, you've made this decision and I guess it is both hard but also a relief in some ways. Can you give a bit of background?

Well, I've had a great career and I'm happy with what I have done. I first came over to Europe in 2000 and first started in Grand Prix in 2001. I qualified for some GPs and was really bummed that I didn't qualify for others. 2002 was my breakthrough year where I qualified for all and finished seventh in the championship. Since then it has been pretty incredible. It was up-and-down from 2004-2008, when I finally won. In 2004 I was second to Ben [Townley], in 2005 I had the knee injury but came back to win the final three Grands Prix; that was supposed to be my year. 2006 was up-and-down and in '07 I did my knee again – finally we won the championship in 2008. It was a big relief. There are not many guys who have come up from South Africa and have done something in Europe; only Albertyn, Langston and myself who have won a championship. I had been going for that championship since 2005...

Then the American chapter began. I grew up watching McGrath and Emig on TV and I always wanted to go to America and try. A part of me was scared to leave GPs because I did not know what to expect. I knew it would be completely different and I'd been there for holidays but never raced there. The only supercross I'd really done was at Bercy and I was already 23. Going over there I was worried about where I stood. I had good offers to stay in Europe but I thought 'I might as well give it a try'. Mitch [Payton, Pro Circuit] had always said to me "win a world championship and you can come and race for me". I ended up being with him for five years and had an incredible time.

I had a couple of podiums in supercross and I never thought I would have achieved those. I imagined I could be in the top five...but when the gate dropped I've always been a fighter and worked hard, believing in my programme. The last few years working with Aldon [Baker] has definitely helped me step up my training. It is pretty incredible what he has done with his athletes in America and I've been with him since 2011. I had a great time in America racing for Mitch and podiumed a bunch in the National Championship, winning six rounds and went for the title twice. I knew I wanted to finish my career with a last go at Europe and where I started, where I made my name. I had an up-and-down season last year and this year has started rough but we are getting the bike good and every weekend we are improving. I've decided at the end of this year will be enough. I've been doing this for a long time. Just the thought of going into the off-season and doing that amount of work and preparation, I think I am mentally not ready for that. When a time like that comes then I guess it is the moment to hang it up. I'm looking forward to the next chapter now.

Have you imagined the next chapter? Will it be a big shift for you...?

Yeah, it is kinda scary because this [MX] is all I have known; that process of training and travelling getting ready for the motocross season. In a way I am looking forward to it. I don't have to get on the bicycle to train and if I want to sit on the sofa then I can. Like I said, I've had a great career but now I'm thirty with a family and there are other things in life that I will look at doing. You have to stop one day and I don't want to hold onto that piece of rope and keep getting dragged along. The guys here are fast.



If I have a good race and I feel good I could probably get a third place...but then I've been used to racing for first. There are young guys coming up with more intensity and are taking more risks than I would. It is something that is always in the back of your mind. I basically don't have the balls like those guys anymore! When it gets like that then it's your time to stop.

Has being in the same team and close proximity to Ryan Villopoto had much influence on the decision?

No, not at all. Obviously with Ryan coming over last year it was motivating for me to go another season. It was already getting hard at the end of 2014 but with Ryan signing I thought I'd have someone to try, push and improve with that was the fastest guy in the world on a motorcycle. I can see where I am speed-wise with him. Ryan getting hurt was part of the sport and it could have been me in that situation. Working with Ryan always kept me pushing forward in the motos and in the training. There was always a goal. The thought of signing another contract and going into the off-season doing all that work by myself was tough mentally. I know that in this sport if you don't put in a solid off-season then you are going to get spanked when it comes to the first round. I want to finish this year strong and try and get into the top five; a podium would be awesome and we'll try for that.

You have three bases of operations with the U.S. Europe and South Africa. What will be the plan at the end of the season?

I will probably stay in the U.S. for next year and maybe a couple more; it depends on what I am doing. Who knows where I will be? I need to figure out the next step. We'll go home and see family back in South Africa and then try and settle in one place and think about the kids' schooling and the rest of it.



Gareth Swanepoel seems to be doing well with his training project of AMA riders. Does that hold appeal for you?

Yeah, that is an option. I think I will still be involved in the industry and I'll still be around, mainly in the U.S. What Gareth is doing is quite interesting and I have learnt a lot about training through my career and working with different guys. The World Championship and the AMA are very different and I've seen and lived those differences. I have a lot of experience about how racing works and how it feels. There is no rush to jump onto something now. My main goal is to focus on this series now because we still have eight races to go. I need to keep working hard in the week because in two and a half months we are done. It is a dangerous sport and you want to be on your game every weekend.




Can you afford to take a complete break for a year or two?

Yeah, I've made some good investments so I think I can take a year or two off and see exactly what we want to do. I signed my first factory contract in 2002 and I'm still in a factory team now. It has been a good thirteen years of making good money from the factories involved in my career. I am truly blessed for that...there have been a lot of guys who have raced for teams and missed payments and I have never been in a situation like that. I have used the money I've made in my career quite well. I will still work and I won't be a guy that retires and does nothing. I will be out there helping other guys, teams, riders, sponsors or whoever.

Can you imagine what it will feel like being on the other side of the fence already?

Man, you will have to ask me about that in six months. Will I miss it? 100%. It is all I have ever known since I was five years old...and that's how to race a motorcycle. It will definitely feel different watching but I am looking forward to it. This is not a job where you can keep going on and on and on. There comes a time – whether you are 24, 30 or 35 where you need to hang it up. I feel at 30 it is the right time. My goal was always to win a world title and I managed to do that and I did the America thing, did great and represented the best team in Lites history. I've build good relationships, good friends, fans, sponsors and also in Europe. I cannot thank everybody enough who had a part in my professional career.





It has been one hell of a ride. I'm not bummed to say I am retiring. Many people never see the amount of work that goes in behind-the-scenes to get in a position to go for race wins and championships and I've had a great career.

Just to give an idea of the cost of a thirty year old's career at the height of both championships then we're looking at a heavy physical toll aren't we?

Ha! I've done my ACL twice in my right knee, torn cartilage and I now have a destroyed hip that will need surgery when I am done. I'll need cartilage replaced there and it will take a good six months to one year. I've been pounding my body for years. My lower back is now killing me because of the hip. I need to get it taken care of because when I am forty I want to be able to jump off the couch and run around with the kids. My body has had enough so I knew 2015 was it. I've had a couple of concussions, broken collarbone, dislocated both shoulders and had corrective surgery, twisted ankles and wrists, broken fingers; I've had a lot fixed to be able to get back to racing. I'm happy that I have not had any dangerous injuries in my career.

Lastly, if the rumours are true about a South African Grand Prix next year then any chance of you doing an 'Albertyn' and making a one-off comeback?

No, and that something I've always said to myself because I see a lot of guys go into retirement and then try and get themselves ready for an appearance like that after missing a year of racing and in my eyes that is playing with fire. When I retire from professional racing then I'll never compete professionally again. For sure I will still ride for fun but I'll never line up on a start gate again.



VICTORY

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WORDS FROM THE TOP

**PIT BEIRER TALKS MXGP 2016, SEARLE,
HERLINGS, 450s, THE FUTURE OF
GRAND PRIX AND MotoGP**

**By Adam Wheeler
Photos by Ray Archer**

An appointment with Pit Beirer is an annual necessity. The German talks like he used to race: direct, from the heart and the hip and barely without hesitation. He is candid and free with his opinions. As the chief power-broker when it comes to one of the most dynamic and successful motorcycle brands in racing then he is the ultimate source of info or clues as to the direction of what KTM might look like or become in the various disciplines in which they compete. If Pit is chatty

then fifteen minutes in his company can often deliver a slew of information. We wanted to know about how Red Bull KTM generally might look with the 2017 MotoGP project building momentum and bound to require some budget reallocation, his thoughts on completing the set with AMA 450SX victory this year, the conquering MXGP set-up, Jeffrey Herlings and whether the days of 450cc racing machinery are numbered in the premier class of the FIM Motocross World Championship...



FEATURE



First of all Supercross. It was the last major off-road title missing from KTM's collection. Were you getting quite nervous this spring watching Ryan Dungey picking up all those results and getting close and closer?

Yeah! Definitely. People can see what is happening today with KTM over there but if you saw how the story started then this title was a project that began for me in 2010. I went there [U.S.] to analyse the situation and with my best friend and colleague Robert Jonas we talked about it on the plane on the way home and said "it's terrible what we are doing". It was wrong and we didn't really know where to start and how to start to fix it. We just knew that we had to do something. Step-by-step we went. We basically ripped the team down to zero and built it up again. Sitting in the stadium in Houston this year watching that title come in...it was so special and very emotional for me. Ryan [Dungey] was so strong after a few races that he made our plans change every week! First we planned to be at the final round...then it was New York then we had to go to Houston. It was one of the highlights of my career in KTM to watch that title being won.

It must have reverberated around the corridors at Mattighofen as well...

Yes. When I was appointed the main person for racing at KTM, bringing Stefan [Everts] here, getting the 350 made and the first link suspension bikes, taking Claudio De Carli and Tony [Cairolì] here; these are milestones that changed the direction for KTM. Not because I was super-clever but because I just brought the right people in. The next big thing was our supercross programme and getting Roger [De Coster]. All these things are the highlights of our development since 2006 and nothing would have happened without the other. If Stefan hadn't joined in 2006 then for sure we wouldn't have been in a position for Tony three years later. Maybe without Tony showing we can win titles in the premier class then a guy like Roger would never have looked at us...and

without Roger, Dungey would not have come. People see us winning today but it has been a long-term commitment and it hasn't come overnight. Things are happening today that you cannot buy with money. There are some really nice relationships in our work and it is nice to look back at those milestones.

Of all the achievements – and we have to include Moto3 Grand Prix wins and titles, Dakar records and Enduro dominance – what really stands out for you?

Maybe I should think about retirement because it can only go down from here! Sometimes it is unfair just to talk about one or two of our disciplines because we have great champions winning races every weekend. We don't even have time any more to enjoy what we reach because we are running like crazy in all these different disciplines. Sometimes it feels like the seasons pass like a fast train. But, honestly, we never forget to stop and enjoy each title in the end because it is not normal and things can change quickly. I get goosebumps when I look on paper and see what we have reached in the last few years. It has been really great and I have to thank my team and all the people around me to operate this whole show.

I imagine there is a folder on your computer that says 'MotoGP' and this is the big project on the horizon. There was a rumour that you might have to scale back some of the off-road racing to move resources across. Any truth in that? Even coming down to details like having two riders instead of three in MXGP...

You have to look at what has happened in the last two years because the same management has brought another brand into the paddock. We have almost doubled our efforts and I have realised at some points this year that it is just too much. From the same background structures you have to bring so much material and the same top management need to steer it. We have to get control somehow.

The rumour you mention is true talking about details and not running three riders in the main MX categories for KTM and Husqvarna because it is just getting too much in terms of material and suspension and all the things around. Although, you know we are crazy enough to take an opportunity if it comes. If we can sign a great rider then we'll have a third one in one of our teams, so don't worry! We are going to keep our flexibility and we will get the budget for it. At the moment I am more scared about securing all the manpower we need rather than getting budget for another engine. You are partly right in that we are concentrating our efforts a bit more but wrong in that we are reducing any of our efforts for MotoGP. Not in any of the disciplines. Our 'Ready to Race' philosophy has worked very well. We won races and we sold more motorcycles, we won important championships and we sold more. The last proof that it works in KTM is with Supercross. Since we have been successful there then we have put the market in America on fire. What we spend here in the off-road paddock comes from off-road sales. What many people still don't know is that last year we sold more street machinery than off-road...but then we also sold more off-road bikes than ever before in our history! It means the balance between our sport activities and the commercial side is very healthy. We always grow one year after the market with our racing. The same thing happens now for the Street. We had three very successful years in Moto3 and at the same moment our street sales became better and better. On the off-road side it will be hard to grow any more because in some markets we own 70% of the share and it just becomes about winning or losing percentages. In on-road we are still small in the total market and growth will come from there in the future. That's why we have to be present in on-road racing and the premium class is MotoGP and that's why we will go there. It will be with a clear strategy, clear planning and very healthy

and strong company. I can reassure my off-road friends that our commitment to off-road racing is 100% not 99 or 101.

Let's talk specifically about MXGP. What about Jeffrey Herlings? Naturally he says it makes sense for him to stay in MX2 for 2016 to keep KTM at the top in that category. What's your opinion?

From our side it would be very illogical to put one champion against the other but I also don't want to put that huge protection shield over Jeffrey because for the next season he squeezed into our contract conversation that he will decide for next year! I shouldn't talk about contract details but the truth is that he will have the final say about it. I think we will find an agreement together but I cannot say in what category he will ride in 2016.



If he moves to MXGP would you see him next to Tony in De Carli's set-up or will he keep in the MX2 area of the team...?

Mmm. As long as we have a strong Tony then we will keep him [Herlings] on the other side of the tent to make sure both have the same feeling to be able to win. If he decides today that MXGP is for him then he will stay where he is.



How do you feel about Tommy Searle's season and comeback to KTM? It seemed that he did everything right in the pre-season but has not had any luck...

It is quite sad. We followed how well he was training over the winter and how motivated he was and how happy he was. In Qatar he hurt his hand and then had huge crashes in Thailand and Spain. We feel really bad because he fit so well into our team and we have such a great atmosphere with him and his girlfriend. It could not be better...except that we need some results also. For us this is quite difficult because this year we gave two riders the chance to really come back when everybody said they were not on a level to be in the factory team right now because of injuries and this-and-that and both of them have struggled big-time to get the results. It puts some pressure on us also.

What about Pauls Jonass? He said his estimation this year was for top ten results and that ended up being too modest for his performance and potential. If Jeffrey moves do you think he can be the guy to lead KTM's title challenge in MX2...? Considering you are unbeaten there since 2008...

Yes. We don't see any 'highlight' rider out there that we have to get right now for a lot of money just to ensure we have the top MX2 guy. If you look at the future of the class then Tim Gajser is definitely one of them and he's fixed on the Honda side. I think it is clear that we'll need to fight with him for the title in the short-term – it looks like. With Pauls I think there was a big risk initially to give him the chance in the factory team. Not for us to lose but because of the pressure on the rider. I can feel that sometimes. You want to give them the chance but also not put the pressure...and having your bike in that tent creates pressure. He has definitely done better than expected. He was not even a top fifteen guy last year and I think he made a twelfth and then better in the sand and that was it. Stefan picked him up and we didn't see any other guy in who we wanted to put all our work and effort. The other guys have pretty much been on the same level for a couple of years in MX2 and we did not want to pay a lot of money just for a third place. We had a lot more motivation to build up a guy where we saw potential for the future and Pauls was one of those and he is paying back more than we expected. We told him many times that if he ran top ten, managed some top eights and by the end of the season get into the top six then we'd be really happy...especially looking at the current top five and the age limit and who would be moving for 2016. We had a schedule for him and he is way ahead of that. He should be the most relaxed of all those guys going for second in the championship because he definitely does not have the pressure to achieve that result. To answer your question, yes I believe he will be one of our leading guys in the future for MX2.

For people who have watched Grands Prix at the track or followed online then there has been another fascinating battle between KTM riders in EMX125 with Jorge Prado, Josiah Natzke and Conrad Mewse as part of a strong junior programme...

It is nice to see that we have certain knowledge about how to prepare kids to be Pro and start their career. I don't really care where these guys are at the end of the year because what really counts is the MX2 world championship and everything before is about preparation for a successful career. We have reduced drastically the support for material when it comes to tuning in the 125 class. They are running stock bikes. I don't want to find out at that age who is the best guy on a bike that has five horsepower more than the competition. Or a better bike full stop. We decided together with Stefan that we wanted to find out who are the best fighters. If you want a long-term career in motocross then you should beat all of your competition with a bike that is not even as good as the others. If you want to be better and a future world champion then you should smoke them with whatever you have. This is what we tried to give those kids and they were a bit shocked to see that they wouldn't get special material but stock bikes are fine, and not just KTMs. Stock bikes are already on a really high level and these youngsters should take them and show us what they can do. A big part of the project is the training with how you should eat, train, think. If there is a certain talent and someone shows he is willing to work then there is a line to make it in our sport. Not just that you have the richest father but because you have the heart and the passion. You can be in the KTM group from zero to the top.

When do you think the factory MXGP teams will be settled for 2016?

That will not happen for the next six weeks or so. We definitely need to give Tommy a chance to come back, Jeffrey needs to decide and Tony needs to become healthy again. We need a strong commitment from Tony again for the future to see what he is planning to do. We will take our time but I don't feel stressed because I feel the next Ken Roczen or Jeffrey Herlings is not out there at the moment. The top guys are settled in the paddock...and we have some of them already.



A word on the 350. With Tony's move to the 450SX-F and Tommy not being here it is almost like that bike has slipped away a little bit. How do you feel about that?

After five years there was always that question mark for Tony about what the 450 could do on one track or another where he felt a little disadvantage in the past. In the end the package together with him was still very strong and it is still not proven that the Tony-450 package is better! At least today it is proven that it was never our push to make him use the 350 and it was his choice. If he wants it back then no problem or if he prefers the 450 then fine, we are maybe far less emotional in that whole discussion than eight years ago when we tried to invent a 350 for the whole paddock. We said "if nobody follows us then we will build one anyway and leave it to the market to buy it". We will not influence one of our riders and we have both possibilities. It looks like the 450 has become more rideable and nice to ride but not less dangerous than at the time when we started the safety discussion eight years ago with the FIM. Two questions: How to win a race today and what is healthy and safe for the sport? Maybe this is the right moment to tell you that I still strongly believe that a 450 for motocross is still too much and too dangerous for our riders. We have one and I think we have a great one – the other companies also – but I think we shouldn't forget that in the last few years we have skipped one class. A 250 these days has more than fifty horsepower and that was the same that Stefan Everts, Mickael Pichon and myself had for the premier class back in the 1990s and 2000s. Now you give fifty-two horsepower to a kid who is fifteen. There was a 125 class and the 250s, and the 500s became too strong and died away. I think we will face that discussion about the big bike soon again.



I can only assume that you might be tired of talking about MotoGP already and the questions will still come when you're at Sachsenring and other events but can you give an update on that? Is it in first gear, second or third?

If we have a six speed gearbox then it is in sixth already! I'm not tired of talking about it; it's just started so I'm really motivated. It is definitely a challenge for myself and my whole department and for the whole company. We started working early in the summer last year and we are already deep into the process. We have engaged quite a lot of people and the bike is completely ready in its concept and the engine will go on the dyno in just two weeks from now. It is taking a direction. It is still very much in the technical phases and we are crazy about building that bike. The time schedule is also crazy and tight and nothing is easy that we touch there because we cannot base it on experience. Any off-road bike we have already made thirty versions of that model and we just change and make a better one. Here we have to start from zero. We have a big mountain ahead and we are treating it with a lot of respect but we are climbing like crazy and learning every day. It is cool. There are three processes: getting the staff at home to build the bike, getting the guys and then some more together to make a test team and to get out there and think about the race team in '17. It is a process that will constantly change until we are on the start line in 2017.





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THE SOUND OF SILENCE...

By Steve Matthes

We were all excited when legend Ryan Villopoto of the Monster Energy Kawasaki team folded up shop here in America to try his hand at the FIM World Championship. Villopoto was fighting a knee injury that would prevent him from trying to win a fifth Monster Energy Supercross title and some burnout. He had another year on his Kawasaki deal and when push came to shove, he didn't feel like buying his way out of it and thought that some fun times travelling, a less strenuous week-in and week-out GP race schedule sounded pretty nice.

Win or lose, Villopoto stated many times that he was done after 2015. He was going to try and do something no American had done since 1994 and win a world title. It was a brave, bold decision and one that many, including myself, applauded.

Well, as we know now the attempt by Villopoto has turned out to be a disaster. One win and an injury at round four that's turned a bit more serious than he or his team thought has left more questions than answers about Villopoto's next move. Only in our sport can the people that pay you millions be shut out of what's wrong and when a racer is coming back. But that's exactly what's gone on with Ryan as he and his crew have gone completely silent to the KRT Kawasaki team in Holland, the media over there and here, his long-time sponsors in the USA and even some of his closest friends.

If the rumors are to be believed then his injury is bad enough to prevent him from racing all but the last three Grand Prix's and there's little desire on his end to get back for those even though the last round is in the USA. It's also believed he's got little desire to get back and try to earn a spot on the American MXDN team. One of the greatest riders of all-time is going to go out with a whimper. And knowing Ryan as I do, he's perfectly fine with this. He's never been motivated by a legacy or to put his mark in motocross history. Which is his prerogative but one day, way in the future, I believe he'll regret that he didn't push a little harder, prepare a little better and different when it comes to this GP plan.

One person who is talking about RV is his long-time trainer Aldon Baker. Baker's not as hands-on with Villopoto as he's been before but he was advising him before and during the season and recently I spoke with Baker on what's next for Villopoto.

Aldon, the MXGP title chase appears to be over. He won a race, he had some good finishes. Unfortunately he crashed and hurt himself. You were still working with him and helping him. When do you expect him back?

It's tough because he's not here with me. That's kind of been a new thing for both of us. We even spoke about that. Communicating over the phone is not easy. It's not ideal. That was never the case for the last four years. I would always look at the guy and know where he was at, so that's tough. He's recouping, get-



ting healthy enough to get back on a motorcycle, that's the first plan. That crash was a little bit more damaging than what we all expected. Not only did he crack a couple fractures in the tailbone but he also compressed some discs. So that's kind of messed up some nerves and he's got a lot of numbness in his knees. He's coming around. He is focusing on just getting healthy and then the next plan is, okay, well, when can he start riding and then building up.

We know the potential he has but how do we get to that point where he can actually go out there and show his potential, that's the big question. We're working on a couple of scenarios of when he could come back, what would make sense and how do we do that with also keeping everyone happy. But he's healing up. I think he's still obviously disappointed. I don't think that guy's ever been in a scenario where a championship is out of the range. We're working on some scenarios and also just trying to analyze what's it going to take to put him back out there where he is going to be challenging for the win because otherwise it's not really worth it.

I think a lot of fans would like to see him come back, race the little last few GP's, then maybe des Nations and call it a day...

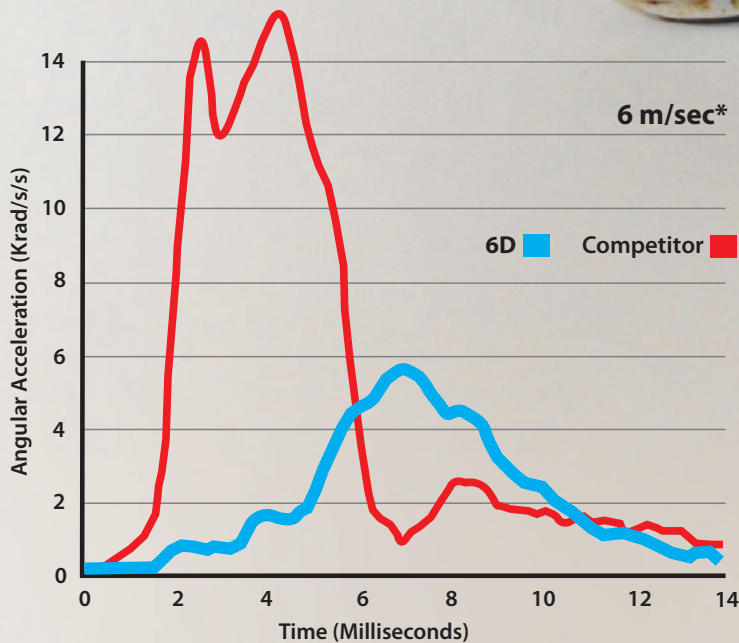
That would be ideal, but it's a lot of logistics on how you end up doing that. He's here in America recouping and doing some training but then you've got to coordinate it with the European team. It's not as easy as everyone would think it would be. But it's been cool. We're all in conversation and working and also

to see what are the best scenarios. For mine, I don't want to see him out there if he's not at all prepared. The way he rides; once again there's potential to hurt himself again, and he knows that. So we're going to analyze what would make sense to where he'd be at his best to come out there.





JUSTIN BOGLE / Hangtown National



ELI TOMAC / Thunder Valley National

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SBK

**PATA RIVIERA DI RIMINI ROUND
MISANO WORLD CIRCUIT MARCO SIMONCELLI**

Race one winner: Tom Sykes, Kawasaki

Race two winner: Jonathan Rea, Kawasaki



PLAY

SYKES AND REA GO AGAIN AT MISANO AND ENSURE THAT FROM 16 RACES IN SBK THIS SEASON ONLY 2 HAVE NOT BEEN WON BY KAWASAKI; A REMARKABLE RECORD. CHAZ DAVIES, DAVIDE GIUGLIANO AND LEON HASLAM TOOK THE OTHER PODIUM PLACES IN ITALY WHERE ANOTHER OLD FAVOURITE RETURNED

Blog by Graeme Brown

Photos by Kawasaki/GeeBee/Ducati Corse Press/Milagro

**ALL STILL
GREEN**

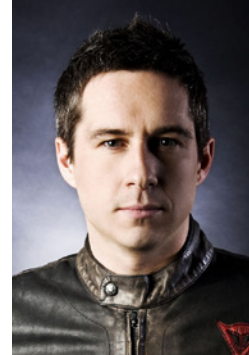
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SBK MIS









LONG LIVE THE EMPIRE...

By Matthew Roberts

On a weekend that saw some of the all-time icons of motorcycling racing return to the track for the 'World GP Bike Legends' event down at Jerez, the World Superbike Championship was doing it for real once again at Misano, as Max Biaggi followed in the footsteps of fellow former champ Troy Bayliss by making a cameo appearance in his home round.

Whilst Wayne Gardner, Kevin Schwantz and Freddie Spencer tickled their way through a carefully choreographed 'race' that saw the Australian take the win (the fact he was one of the event organisers had nothing to do with the result, no doubt!), there was little such courtesy afforded to Biaggi by the current generation of Superbike superstars.

If there was one thing the self-styled 'Roman Emperor' enjoyed during his glittering career it was upsetting his opposition and he was clearly in the mood for just that from the moment free practice started on Friday. WSBK rules on gearbox settings (only one ratio is allowed for the whole season) and engine allocation don't really count as a restriction when you only plan to race one or two rounds, so Max was able to dial in the settings he'd found in a test at Misano just over a week beforehand, ramp up the power and roll back the years; setting the fastest time in both sessions on the opening day.

Even taking his technical advantages into account, not to mention his 43 years of age (44 this Friday), this can't have sat well with the rest of the WSBK grid, not least the other two factory Aprilias of Leon Haslam and Jordi Torres. After qualifying in between his team-mate in a creditable fifth place, with Leon second and Jordi sixth, the general feeling was that Max would be feeling more elbows than handshakes on his return to racing on Sunday.

It proved to be the case as Biaggi was nudged wide and shuffled back several positions through the tight first sector in both races, but the old boy proved he can still give as good as he gets and he rode brilliantly to come back for a pair of sixths. Compare this directly to thirteenth and sixteenth for Bayliss at Phillip Island, which the Australian followed up with ninth and eleventh in Thailand, and the potential for a more competitive showing is clear. After finishing just six seconds down on Jonathan Rea in race 2 on Sunday, Biaggi is confident he can be even closer to the front when he makes his second reappearance in Malaysia in early August.

The 'World GP Bike Legends' event, meanwhile, was a relative success. Of course the guys weren't really racing, but on such valuable machinery that most of them didn't own and with those brittle old injuries still holding them back, why would they?



SBK MIS

World GP Bike Legends



Around 8,000 fans turned out simply to savour the sight of Gardner et al circulating alongside their familiar foes of yesteryear – the likes of Christian Sarron, Steve Parrish, Graeme Crosby, Joan Garriga and Didier de Radigues – aboard classic two-stroke 500cc Grand Prix machines (including Schwantz on the very Suzuki XR84 RGV500 he rode as World Champion back in 1994).

Biaggi remains one of the top six racers since that golden generation of 500cc megastars in the mid-80s and early 90s and, along with Valentino Rossi, he bridged the gap to the modern MotoGP 'aliens'. Max may never have

won a premier-class Grand Prix world title but he is second only to Dani Pedrosa on the list of riders with most wins not to do so (Max has 13, Dani 26). Only Rossi, Casey Stoner, Jorge Lorenzo and Marc Marquez can claim a better win rate in the MotoGP era.

Biaggi's career ended on a high with those WSBK titles in 2010 and 2012 but looking at Rossi's resurgence over the past two seasons, perhaps his time in Grand Prix ended prematurely. So it's nice to see him back where, like Bayliss, he still belongs: amidst the speed and thunder of top class racing, rather than the polish and nostalgia of an old boys' exhibition at Jerez.





VINI VIDI VICI? WELL NOT QUITE...

By Graeme Brown



The return of the Roman Emperor at the weekend had the Italian motorcycling media salivating at the prospect of the old warrior vanquishing his younger foes. It wasn't to be. Max Biaggi arrived at Misano in a storm of press speculation over the why, what and how. Why was he there? What did he and Aprilia expect to achieve? How would it impact on the Championship battle?

Personally I saw it merely as a publicity stunt to try and attract a bigger crowd to the Misano circuit. The Italian press were comparing it to Troy Bayliss' return at Phillip Island and Thailand at the start of the year and speculating if Biaggi would perform better than the Australian. I am sure there was a bit of Max that was hoping to show up and confound the naysayers – like me – and score a podium place.

Like all stories there was a bit more substance to it than that however. Biaggi has been extensively testing the RSV4 at Mugello and Misano and it seemed logical to enter as a wildcard to get an idea of how the development work matched up to the competition. Ducati did exactly the same with Lucca Scassa riding on Friday and Michele Pirro taking over on Saturday and racing on Sunday. Neither of them are multiple World Champions so the media interest was understandably lower but Biaggi's role was more or less that of a test mule.

Those that saw past the hype were able to find out that there were a number of technical developments on Biaggi's bike that weren't ready to be handed over to the Red Devil's squad currently running the factory team. At Kawasaki they also reckoned that his bike was revving much harder than those of Haslam and Torres. With each rider having an allocation of 7 engines for the season, before incurring a penalty,

Biaggi and the Ducati test riders obviously have the ability to use all seven engines over the few races they have entered, therefore stressing it harder in terms of its performance and lifespan.

It made me chuckle when there was a whirl of excitement on Friday evening after he had topped the time sheets. It harked back to the old days of SBK wildcards. Friday's would always see the local hero posting fast times while the main championship contenders set about testing tyres and suspension set up rather than chasing a lap. In the end he posted two sixth places with race two being the most impressive; only 5 seconds down on Jonathan Rea. So there is life in the old dog yet but he was bested by Leon Haslam in both races and that is where Aprilia will be focusing their attention in the run in.

On the matter of engine usage Dorna released figures for each team at the end of the race at Misano and it threw up another impressive stat for Kawasaki. Both Rea and Sykes currently have four engines 'in use'. That is, four engines that haven't gone pop. They are the only one of the top teams with riders that has a full complement of motors still at their disposal.

Finally, Jonathan Rea also conceded on Sunday that he now has to have one eye on the title. Every time I have spoken to him up until now he has been very focused on concentrating on the next race and only that. On Sunday he acknowledged that he has to think about the championship but really wanted to win a race at the weekend. That he did and broke Troy Bayliss' record points tally after 16 races – Rea now has 375 with the previous record being 360. Given the metronomic ability he has shown this year to win or place second, allied to the obvious reliability of the Kawasaki, more records are bound to fall before the end of the season.





MotoGP

ARE MARC MARQUEZ'S HOPES OF A THIRD STRAIGHT TITLE STILL BURIED IN THE CATALAN GRAVEL? AN INDICATION WILL BE SEEN THIS WEEKEND AT ASSEN BUT THE MONSTER ENERGY GP NEAR BARCELONA WAS ANOTHER ROUT BY YAMAHA AS DANI PEDROSA MANAGED A FIRST PODIUM OF THE SEASON

Photos by Martin Heath/Monster Energy

**BLUE
OVER
RED**



Jorge Lorenzo rounds the distinctive La Caixa curve at Catalunya. It was on the entry to the tight left-hander that he was tagged by Marc Marquez who would crash out of the running



PLAY




Another podium and a 100% record for Rossi this season. If he can repeat his 2013 Assen victory this weekend then he (or Lorenzo) will give Yamaha their sixth win in a row; something never achieved yet in Grand Prix by the blue brand...Rossi himself has totalled 9 wins in Holland





Danny Kent rules again and has increased his Moto3 World Championship lead at every round since Austin. He could be the first rider of the entire current crop to win at Assen. Marquez (right) ponders whether to win it or bin it





After a second DNF at Cataluyna
Dovizioso will be happy to get to Assen
where he was 2nd on the Ducati last
year and perhaps not so much need for
hard braking stoppages like this...





Another Lorenzo's Land while MX GOAT
Ricky Carmichael pays his first visit to a
European MotoGP with Monster Energy





THE RIGHT APPROACH?

By David Emmett www.motomatters.com

“I never worry about the championship,” Casey Stoner used to tell us. “I just try to win races. Win races, and the championship will take care of itself.” It was an attitude that saw him severely criticised from time to time, especially when he crashed out trying to stay with battle for the podium. But it also saw him win two MotoGP titles, and finish second, third and fourth in the championship when he didn’t win it. In his seven seasons in the premier class, he racked up 38 victories, a total surpassed only by Valentino Rossi, Giacomo Agostini and Mick Doohan.

Marc Márquez stepped into Casey Stoner’s boots when he departed, and came with the exact same attitude. His approach was that if you are good enough to win, and are willing to try do so at all costs, then the championships will come of their own accord. That approach saw him break record after record, as youngest race winner, youngest premier class champion, and many more. It gained him two successive crowns and saw him win the first ten races of 2014 virtually unopposed.

The start of the 2015 season has shown the inherent weakness in that approach. With the development of the Honda RC213V disappearing down the rabbit hole of HRC engineering, trying to win at all costs on a bike which is not really capable of winning tends to end in the gravel. Márquez has now crashed out of the last two races, making it three DNFs from the first seven rounds. He trails championship leader Valentino Rossi by 69 points, and Jorge Lorenzo by 68, and is now firmly out of contention for the title, barring absolute catastrophe for the Movistar Yamaha team.

Was Márquez wrong to try to stay with Jorge Lorenzo in the opening laps of the Barcelona race? Not necessarily. Before the start it was clear that he was capable of being fast over a single lap

although that speed only came with some risk. It was equally clear that Jorge Lorenzo was in the zone again, and would be hard to beat. And, being a Sunday, it meant that Valentino Rossi would also be a threat, once his crew had found the performance tweak they invariably seem to find during morning warm-up. Márquez went into the race trailing Rossi by 49 points, and Lorenzo by 43 points. With twelve races left in the season, mathematics dictated that he simply could not afford to lose any more points to the Yamaha men. If he lost six points to Rossi or twelve to Lorenzo, he would no longer have his shot at the title in his own hands. A deficit of 55 points with eleven races to go would mean he would have to win every race for the rest of the season, and hope that the two Yamaha men would start stealing points off each other.

Sitting on the grid at Barcelona, knowing the Honda still had a lot of work to do to make the bike competitive, Márquez must have realized his choices were limited. If he rides safely within the parameters of the bike, he may have ended third, or perhaps even fourth or fifth. That would have put the championship out of reach, with the certain knowledge that Honda would still need a few races to find a solution to the RC213V’s problems, or at least reduce them enough to still be competitive. The alternative was to risk it all trying to win the race, or at least finish ahead of Lorenzo and Rossi, claw some points back and hope Honda bring the cavalry soon. The risk of crashing may be higher, but realistically, he would be out of the title race just as much if he ceded another nine, twelve or fourteen points to the Yamaha men, as if he crashed and handed them twenty five points. If he wanted to get his title defence back on track, his only option was to win. Nothing else would be good enough. Crashing out of the Barcelona race made less difference to his championship challenge than you would nor-



mally assume. It merely confirmed what Márquez already knew in his mind.

Ultimately Márquez' crash leaves the title firmly in the hands of the Movistar Yamaha team, but which one of the riders is now favourite to wear the crown? On his current run of form, you would have to favour Jorge Lorenzo, the Spaniard taking his fourth race in a row at Barcelona. Yet his victory came in less imperious style than at any other GPs so far this season with Valentino Rossi closing down his teammate throughout the second half of the race.

Rossi is clearly getting faster every weekend but his weakness remains the same. He simply cannot qualify well. Starting from the third row means that even after a fantastic start, he has three or four riders between himself and Lorenzo, and he is losing time fighting his way past the men who qualified ahead of him. By the time he is free Lorenzo is already a couple of seconds up the road, and riding at such a punishing and metronomic pace that actually gaining ground on him is nigh on impossible. Rossi can creep closer lap by lap, but until Dorna decide to extend the race length by another 20%, he is going to find it hard to actually catch Lorenzo and get close enough to have a shot at getting past. Making the races longer is simply not an option.

Where is Rossi going wrong? It is perhaps the one area where he has not been able to adapt his riding style and approach. Rossi has done an astounding job in 2015, adapting and changing his style to be competitive with younger riders such as Márquez and Lorenzo. His body position has changed, leaning further off the bike and moving his head forward and inside. Yet he has not been able to convince himself to adopt the kamikaze first-lap dash, hammering his bike into the first corner at top speed out of the pits already. That

approach was championed and perfected by Casey Stoner, the Australian often setting fastest sector times halfway round his out lap, before going on to demolish the lap record on his first flying lap. Rossi is still distinctly old school, preferring the long and more circuitous approach to a fast lap, sidling up to it by upping the pace over the course of half an hour, before pulling out all the stops in the final moments of a long session.

But qualifying isn't a long session any more. It is a quick dash for a time, with two runs of two hot laps in which to set a time, if you are lucky. Going fast at the end of FP3 to ensure he passes directly into Q2 is no longer a problem for the Italian. But the balls and brain out charge straight out of the pits in Q2 is simply not something Rossi is capable of at the moment.

Can it be trained? Of course it can, and to an extent that is exactly what Marc Márquez has been doing by racing dirt track. On the short oval circuit that he uses to train on, practice sessions consist of lots of simulated races, with multi-rider starts being followed by five minutes of flat-out laps of a race. Rossi's training style is a little more focused, and a little more relaxed. The Italian uses the massively sprawling layout of the tracks at his dirt track ranch to work on bike control, braking and passing, and learn about adapting to the conditions. The longer layout means that he has time to sit behind other riders and figure out where their weak points like, and where to attack. Races are longer, giving the riders more time to think. On a qualifying lap, conscious thought is your enemy. It is a matter of switching off all sense of fear, of logic, of reason, and adopting the persona of a Viking Berserker. You have to embrace the Red Mist, rather than resist it. Assen is Rossi's next hope of harnessing the Red Mist, and taking the fight to his teammate. The omens are good, but it won't be easy.



LORIS BAZ

THE TRANSITION

THE SPORT'S LATEST FRENCH ACE TALKS HEIGHT,
ADAPTATION, ASPIRATIONS &...ZINEDINE ZIDANE

LORIS BAZ ON TACKLING **MotoGP**

By Adam Wheeler
Photos by Martin Heath

After building a reputation as one of Superbike's ziest and most exciting riders Loris Baz is paddling with a strong tide in MotoGP as a rookie and in the midst of an Open class that provides both a learning seat and a technical 'holding stage' for how the category will change in the coming two years. The twenty two year old's large frame dwarfs the narrow entrance of his Athina Forward Racing Team's hospitality as he comes through to take a seat for an interview. Swapping rapidly between Italian, French and accomplished English Loris is an engaging interviewee; clearly well versed and experienced in media work as you'd expect at this level.

After the controversial end to the 2014 SBK campaign he probably knows that a Qatar orientated question is on the horizon (well, we couldn't ignore it, especially with some people writing about the dearth of a good spat in the current Superbike series in comparison) but the truth is that Loris has thrown himself into MotoGP and has been creeping up to the position of best Open class runner – a feat he achieved recently at Mugello in Italy and round six.

The guys at Forward could not have been more helpful in arranging this chance to get an insight into a newcomer's experience in MotoGP and Loris is up for a good chat...

OK, so summarise how you feel so far...

It is getting better and better. At the beginning of the year we had to work a lot on the position of the bike, we had to fit it to my size. It took a long time, until Sepang '2' and even at Qatar where I received a new seat. We were still changing things but it got to a point where we could concentrate on the general settings of the bike and it is improving every round for sure.

Is it one of those things whereby even a couple of centimetres here or there for your position can change the bike a lot?

Yeah. In the beginning the bike was short – it seems that everybody is quite short here! – and we had to adapt it. You have to get comfortable on the bike before you can do anything, so I think the seat is six centimetres higher and ten further back compared to Stefan's, so it moved all the settings a lot. If the bike is carrying twenty more kilos and is shifted further back then of course it has repercussions. We just needed time because there are not many tall guys here and the suspension technicians were unfamiliar being that extreme with the configuration. I think we are doing a good job.

What blew your mind coming from the Kawasaki?

The tyres and the rigidity of the chassis means that the feeling is totally different. Also the riding style. You have to carry much more corner speed whereas in Superbike it was more 'stop-and-go'. The grip of the front tyre is crazy when you come from Superbike and it takes some getting used to.

Is that process of acclimatisation all about pushing a limit lap by lap?

Yeah, when you get on the bike and then you make a mistake you learn. But getting injured means losing a lot of preparation time and that was the main thing going around my head. I was trying to improve but not make too many mistakes. I think we did well and I think I was one of the slowest at the beginning from the riders that came into the series this season but we had a lot of things to go through. As soon as I felt good then we had a decent race, like in Argentina. You have to take your time. You have to get to know the team, the new style, the new bike and even my crew chief is here in MotoGP for the first time.

LORIS BAZ





When you were growing up did you want to get to Grand Prix? French off-roaders often have a fancy for supercross compared to MXGP. British road racers can look favourably at Superbike as a route...

When I was a child I wanted to come to GP and I think this is a dream of most riders. I was sure that going through Superbike one way or the other I would get here. I wanted to be in MotoGP but I had some good years also in Superbike. It is a really good championship and also the paddock and the whole scene is very cool. It was a good five or six years there for me.

Forward seems like a good team with a lot of resources but you came from one of the best set-ups in Superbike...

Sure. I came from a factory team with guys who have a lot of experience and almost everything was perfect. Coming here was a good surprise. Even though it is a private team everybody has knowledge, experience and they

work well. We also get good help from Yamaha for the bike. The way to work is different but I felt good in Superbike and I feel good here. I think 90% of the teams in the world championship are professional now.

Does a little part of you wish you'd come here earlier?

No, I wasn't able to get here earlier because I was tall from a young age and couldn't get on a 125. I had to go through Superbike and I really enjoyed riding those bikes, from the R6 to the ZX10. I had a lot of fun in that paddock and I have the feeling that if I had to come through Moto3 then I would not be here. It was my way. It maybe was not the easiest one but I learnt a lot and enjoyed it a lot. I'm twenty-two and I'm here so I don't think I am too late!

When you read these reports saying 'Loris Baz is too big for GP' what do you think? Your height shouldn't be an obstacle should it?

I'm sure that soon a tall rider will win some races and the teams will not want the short ones any more! It has always been like this in this world...but Rossi is not that small and I remember Marco Simoncelli was also not short. I think he was 186-188; not so different to me and he had the factory behind him. They believed he could make results and built a bike for him. As long as you have the support and the guys believe you can do it then I don't think your size is a big disadvantage.

Did you have to change your mindset in the winter? You went from a series where you were going for race wins and now a top ten finish is a great result...

I was expecting this. When I wanted to come here and with my manager we tried to find the best way I knew that I would not be in the same position as last year. I enjoyed last season and the one before with the fights for victories and podiums nearly every race and also going for the title until almost the end in 2014. Coming here I realised it would be like my first in Superbike where I would have to learn... but that's cool because it means I have a lot of years in front of me and I really hope I will be fighting for some podiums again soon.

Mugello was the best race/result so far where you finished as top open rider. That was just six rounds in, so some progress...

Yeah, sure. I was fighting with the top runners nearly all the race. We made another step at Mugello. It was very cool and showed how we are working. Also with the electronics. The target is still to show some small improvement every round.

How do you find the treatment from the press? You have some other French riders here and also Fabio coming into GP with a lot of hype...

In the past, maybe ten years ago, you did not have many French riders at the top. Maybe just Randy [De Puniet] and Sylvain [Guintoli]. For a couple of seasons we've had French riders doing well pretty much everywhere. Sylvain was world champion last year, Fabio has come into Moto3 and Johann was winning in Moto2 and Jules [Cluzel] is going well in Supersport. MotoGP is missing one and we are trying – with Mike [Di Meglio] – to be as competitive as possible. I think the French press is helping with that and I don't think we could have anyone else from the country doing any better.

Away from the track did you change anything coming into MotoGP?

I still live in Geneva and it has been ten years now. I changed my training a little bit to try different things and go a bit harder. In Superbike you have two races that are a little bit shorter and it is something unique. My body got used to keeping a bit of energy in the first race for the second and that changed here. In the first GPs it took some getting used to. We've been doing longer training because the races are ten-fifteen minutes more. I am trying to be a bit more serious and improve little things every year. I have some really good people around me: my family, manager and physical trainer and a coach who helps me at the track and who was my manager in Superstock. I have a good team that teaches me a lot of things and make life easier.

Do you live to train? Are you always on a bicycle, for example?

I'm more of a runner. I don't like cycling so much. I do it, but I cannot go for five hours; I get bored. I live in the Swiss mountains and I was born just thirty minutes away in the French Alps. I go there almost every day to run in the mountains. I try to do something a bit different every day so as to not get bored. If you can enjoy the training then it is not a problem.

Coming into this 'world' do you feel that you have some space? There are other riders who might be after your saddle. You have pressure to perform but are there a couple of years to learn?

I don't think you can take too long to learn. If you make some good things in the first year then you will have some chances in the second and that is the same everywhere. If you go slow for some races and you don't feel good then people will forget you. If you go the other direction then people will call you a hero! We are used to that...Coming here I was a bit surprised that the other riders were so nice. I also heard that in a press conference a lot of guys like Lorenzo said 'yeah, he should have his chance here' and that was cool. When I came into Superbike nearly 90% of the riders were looking at me like 'fuck; how do you have the best bike in the paddock at eighteen years of age?!'. That first year in Superbike was hard but I also think that's normal. I ended up doing some good things in Superbike and showed that I had the potential to come here. I am now trying to show that I can have a place here for a few years.

I have to ask...when you think back now do you think you went out of Superbike in an explosive way? Do you look back at Qatar and think 'mmm...'

[directly] I would have liked to have won race two in Qatar but I made a mistake in the first corner; that's the only thing I am not happy about. For the rest...it is racing and I think I had my reasons to do it at this moment.

It was a sequence of events that had everybody in racing talking though...and that's quite unusual...

I think almost everybody has asked me something about this. It's normal! But I had my reasons...for the racing now I'm happy that Johnny [Rea] is winning because the mechan-

ics there are really nice guys. I'm going for dinner with them on Sunday and they are going to break my balls because Barcelona won the Champions League and I'm a Real Madrid fan. I'm happy Johnny is winning for them because they deserve to be on the top.

I guess you're a Madrid fan because of Zidane...

Yeah, I think so. I used to know him because he came to my Mum's restaurant when I was a kid. I spent three years in a team that cheered for Barcelona and when there was a 'Classico' then I was not allowed to go in the hospitality! I'm not a big football fan but I like to watch and it was funny to throw some jokes at each other. About Zidane I have a picture with him from 1998 and when France won the World Cup. He came to spend Christmas in the town and my Mum had a restaurant that she closed in the winters but he had that many people with him and around him that he couldn't go out of the house so he asked us if we could open and he could be alone with his family. I'm in the picture with his son Enzo who is doing quite well now at Madrid. Nice photos and nice memories.

Does your Mum still have the restaurant?

No, but I still go around that place to train.

So no Loris racing pictures around on the walls...

For sure there was! People would come with their cars and helicopters to that place. When they landed I would drive down with my Quad at five or six years old to show them up to the restaurant and then they'd give me a ride in the helicopter! It was funny. The place was 1800m up in front of Montblanc. If you want to go walking then it was forty minutes just to arrive to the restaurant. My Dad comes to every race now.



Gee Bee Images

I remember reading somewhere that you are quite tight with your family...

Yes, it is important for me. My friends also. I feel good having these people around me. My family have been doing so much from when I was eight years old because I always wanted to be a motorbike racer and to be in GP. They did everything they could to bring me here. Now they can enjoy me in Grand Prix; even if I think it is quite stressful for them! I think my Dad feels more pressure than I do on the bike!

Lastly, it was curious to hear you talking about the rhythm of a race and how in Superbike you had the strategy to cope with two outings. How is it in MotoGP in comparison?

Really fast from the beginning to the end... actually I don't think the first lap is that quick but I think the riders have some bad memories of the tyres from a couple of years ago which need a lot of time to warm-up. After the first lap then it is really fast until the end. It has a lot to do with tyres because they last almost all the way to the end. In Superbike they dropped off quite a lot and you had to save them. You didn't push the whole time, whereas here you always need to push. It is not an easy thing... but then it is also not the hardest thing to learn.



MX

GRAND PRIX OF ITALY

MAGGIORA PARK • JUNE 14th • Rnd 9 of 18

MXGP winner: Romain Febvre, Yamaha

MX2 winner: Tim Gajser, Honda



MESSY...

HAPPY 60TH YAMAHA. ROMAIN FEBVRE SCORED THE SECOND OF HIS MXGP HAT-TRICKS IN THE MUDDER OF MAGGIORA AND DID SO IN DRAMATIC FASHION WHILE TIM GAJSER PUT JEFFREY HERLINGS ON THE BACK FOOT ONCE MORE

By Adam Wheeler
Photos by Ray Archer

MXGP ITA







Luciano Pavarotti's vocal chords tested the red zone of the Maggiore PA system on the morning of raceday for the Grand Prix of Italy and it seemed to cheer a bumper crowd around the steep hills who were already fighting a war with the mud. Round nine stirred with a depressingly grim weather forecast but it was not until Sunday morning that the thunderstorms passed, unloaded and then departed until the evening. The effect on the tracks was almost devastating for the public and if the rain had continued then it is likely the race programme would have been affected more than simply shuffling the second EMX125 moto to the end of the day. For the course itself then the climate slowed, roughened and transformed the Italian hard-pack into a different prospect compared to the fast dusty 'concrete' of Saturday. The Maggiore mush still didn't change the fact that the first three riders around the first corner would be the protagonists for maximum points.

Maggiore was special for Febvre and for Yamaha on their 60th anniversary. It was also remarkable for Rockstar Suzuki's Kevin Strijbos last lap ploy on Max Nagl to celebrate victory in a season that has been battered by wrist and thumb injury frustration. For Nagl's team-mate Todd Waters it represented a career high point with his first podium finish in just

fourteen MXGP appearances. For the Italian crowd it was rousing to see David Philippaerts pushing for a podium position three years and four broken wrists after his last trophy and at the circuit a few miles from his home. Alessandro Lupino also came out of the shoulder-injury wilderness to prove he has some speed and mettle on a 450 in his first term in MXGP. In MX2 it was the second career victory and second of the season for HRC Gariboldi's Tim Gajser after some long sought after consistency brought the Slovenia just rewards.

There were memorable moments. Wilvo Nestaan's Alex Tonkov celebrating a first MX2 moto victory...and then making an enemy of Red Bull KTM's Pauls Jonass with the most blatant take-out you're likely to see this season. Evgeny Bobryshev's phenomenal speed on Saturday only to bomb-out in both starts on Sunday. Jeremy Van Horebeek finding his way into the top three again for the first time this year. Credit to Hitachi Construction Machinery Revo KTM's Shaun Simpson for somehow skipping over a bouncing gate in the second MXGP moto and arriving to threaten the rear wheel of Waters in fourth place. Jeffrey Herlings steered a stuttering KTM to sixth in the first moto and a second race win was not enough to dislodge Gajser.



Cairolì enters a dark place on Saturday and after his Qualification Heat crash in the dry means two more fractures to his left hand. Desalle (right, middle) does not make it through to Sunday





On the other side of the scale Maggiora was forgettable for Rockstar Suzuki's Clement Desalle. The Belgian's right shoulder held fast but Desalle was quiet and uncomfortable in the paddock, almost aware that the stretched MCL in his left knee would seriously limit his possibilities to race. After practice Desalle informed the team that he was pulling the plug on what had been a very consistent season of six podiums in seven rounds and would not be in Germany either as he needed time to improve the stability of his knee. World Champion Tony Cairoli experienced a '180' at Maggiora. From a holeshot and lead in the Qualification Heat to a crash and another fracture of his left hand, somehow 222 bore the pain and made it through both motos to claim 17 points. It was a unbelievable performance and you only had to see the multi-coloured state of Cairoli's left lower arm on Sunday night to imagine the discomfort and anguish he must have suffered to replenish his championship points tally and satisfy the vast microscope of the fans. Depending on what else happens this season then his efforts at Maggiora for a 7-18 could be pivotal.

Wilvo Forkrent KTM's Steven Frossard crashed out of a potential top three qualification spot on Saturday and sat on the sidelines for the rest of the meeting with a stiff back. The same fate awaited Wilvo Nestaan Husqvarna's Dean Ferris with illness.

Some riders claimed the ruts and holes of Maggiora made the Grand Prix of Italy like Enduro. It was certainly a form of endurance as MXGP scribbled away nine rounds and eighteen motos of the season and extended the workload of the medical facilities the series offers. Germany rolled up next before the FIM World Championship headed into July and some maps of northern Europe in the GPS.



Memorable podiums for the Rockstar Suzuki boys Jeremy Seewer (left) and Kevin Strijbos (this page). Also for Husqvarna's Todd Waters (left, 47). Romain Febvre came back to sixth place in the second moto despite riding with a damaged handlebar after his heavy downhill tumble



Clear vision from Scott rider Jordi Tixier on a dry Saturday. The World Champion went down in the second moto on Sunday and missing the MX2 podium for the first time in six Grands Prix







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SCOTT

Summertime and the period of the year when apparel brands like to unveil their latest kit for riders and fans and Scott Sports were the latest to show off their wares at the Grand Prix of Germany. UFO presented a new boot at Maggiora and Scott also had a needed upgrade of their footwear with the 550 and an innovative hinge that meant getting into and removing the boot never looked easier.

First up the Goggles.

The flagship **Tyrant** model (patented fit mechanism, RAM air plug and adjustable noseguard) comes in three new Oxide colours (Pink/Yellow, Turquoise/Blue, Red/Blue) while the entry level **Hustle** (anti-fog treatment and no-slip silicone strap) model carries Blue/Green, Purple/Black, Red/White colourways. Again the 89SI Pro goggle means that kids can wear the same as any Hustle version. Some serious engineering has gone into fabrication of the frames, the moisture wicking foam and the lenses that can also come in six different chrome colour shades.

www.scott-sports.com/gb/en/products/motosports-offroad-goggles



Tyrant Pink/Yellow



Tyrant Red/White

SCOTT

Scott's **550** boots are the subject of an interesting 'making off' feature in an upcoming OTOR where we were invited to the company's factory in Italy to see how the redesigned footwear was created and then manufactured. Things to look for include the Free Open Entrance: the boot bends back in 'tulip' form making the process of putting it on and taking it off a cinch. There is also the multi-axial pivot that means the boot moves naturally with your ankle and suits any type of leg shape. The 550 has a simple three buckle system and a replaceable sole. It also has a slim toe profile to enable better feel for the levers and several other features like a flexible calf plate, shin guard and rubber grip guard on the instep. At the moment the 550 will ship in three different colour options, all shown here.

Next issue we'll feature the 350 and 450 apparel. Scott dropped the ball slightly with some awkward-on-the-eye designs in 2015 but the '16 gear is cleaner and more attractive for general off-road riding and also blasting around a track.

www.scott-sports.com







BACKPAGE

Monster Energy Girls
By Monster Energy







'On-track Off-road' is a free, bi-weekly publication for the screen focused on bringing the latest perspectives on events, blogs and some of the very finest photography from the three worlds of the FIM Motocross World Championship, the AMA Motocross and Supercross series' and MotoGP. 'On-track Off-road' will be published online at www.ontrackoffroad.com every other Tuesday. To receive an email notification that a new issue available with a brief description of each edition's contents simply enter an address in the box provided on the homepage. All email addresses will be kept strictly confidential and only used for purposes connected with OTOR.

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